

The Cornell Daily Sun

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South Vietnam . . . Operation Sunrise [ARTICLE]

Cornell Daily Sun, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 139, 9 May 1962, Page 4

South Vietnam . . .

Operation Sunrise

Set back in the interior of South Vietnam, the Vietnamese government with the help of the United States has inaugurated a "resettlement" project for the peasants and villagers. It is called Operation Sunrise. Although the name sounds inviting, the actual proceedings of this plan are alarming.

This is "the first comprehensive plan to pacify South Vietnam," according to recent reports from U.S. foreign correspondants. The reports on Operation Sunrise, from these journalists seems to imply that this so-called regroupment is the only way out of the stalemate.

The measure involves the relocation—by force if necessary—of Vietnamese who live in villages or areas susceptible to Viet Cong influence. The peasants are literally rounded up by government troops and sent to camps which, according to the Diem government, will eventually be turned into new villages for the displaced.

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In addition to circling the designated villages with troops and then moving in toward the center in order to trap **all** the villagers, the troops—(remember they're on our side—) raze the huts and remaining buildings in the area when "relocation" has been achieved.

Supposedly, each family is to receive \$21 for their

Supposedly, each family is to receive \$1000 in cooperation, but the money has not reached many of the displaced. In fact, much of it is kept by the South Vietnamese authorities for the cost of the new homes. Thus the peasants will probably receive something like five dollars—a generous sum indeed.

What is quite interesting about this operation is the reaction of the peasants who are, after all, involved in this altruistic affair. In one instance, seventy families volunteered to be relocated; the other 135 in this specific village refused and were forcibly removed with only the minimum amount of valuables. The village was burned to the ground after it was cleared of its inhabitants.

According to some reports, many of the males in the village flee to the woods before the troops can move into the area. The men fear that they will be pressed into the army if they are caught by the Diem soldiers. This is no doubt true.

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The settlement camps, which are supposed to house the Vietnamese peasants, are analogous to the French concentration camps in Algeria. One newspaper reporter of the New York Times reports "that the new settlement had a minimum of barbed wire to 'avoid' a concentration camp atmosphere." One American commander in South Vietnam who is connected with the regroupment has stated in reference to the camps that they are no "happy hollow." With barbed wire and temporary quarters for people who were bodily moved from their homes, this is the understatement of the year.

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The rationale for this project lies in the Viet Cong advances throughout South Vietnam.

Both the United States and the Diem government do not want the guerilla bands to be aided by Vietnamese villagers. The U.S. has stressed that Operation Sunrise can also serve to improve the life of the peasant by construction of new modern villages with schools and hospitals. The ideal of reform is

ine; whether it can work with a corrupt government like Diem's is questionable.

Although this might be the first such project to combat the Viet Cong, it has the overtones of the police state with the concentration camp atmosphere to boot. If it is true that the Diem government is not popular among the South Vietnamese and the peasants are not disposed to Operation Sunrise, then we should not be surprised to see the Viet Cong succeed even more.

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